IMPROVING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY USING LINGUISTIC APPROACH

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Abstract: It is taken for granted that students' vocabulary can be developed to a certain degree and its development can be done through a number of ways. This study investigated the effectiveness of linguistic approach in developing EFL learners' vocabulary. 50 participants were involved in the study. They were divided into experimental and controlled groups, consisting of 25 students. The experimental group was taught using linguistic method while the controlled was instructed with a conventional method. The experiment was carried out in the classroom setting and lasted for one semester. The two groups were evaluated by means of pre-and post-test. The results show that the experimental group performed better than the controlled. The value of t-test is bigger than the value of t-table, and assessment of student' performance level, by the help of two native speakers, shows significant development; it developed from marginal to modest or between modest and competent, or from basic level to intermediate with the mean difference of 1.76.

Keywords: vocabulary mastery, linguistic approach.

Teaching EFL in Indonesia can be viewed from two channels: formal and nonformal channels. The first is related to the formal education in which English is taught as a compulsory subject from the first year of junior high schools up to the first year of college. For the teaching of EFL at junior and senior high schools, the government through the Department of Education and Culture, now Department of National Education, has provided the syllabus and the instructional materials for the teaching and learning process. The aims of EFL teaching at this level are, among others, to accelerate the process of national development, to facilitate the maintenance of friendly relations with other people, to promote Indonesian foreign policy, and to lead the students to a working knowledge of English in all of the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Teaching English at tertiary level, however, varies from university to university. Commonly, it is up to the university concerned to design and select materials/textbooks available on the market or to create its own teaching materials.

So far, it is reading proficiency which has been is given more emphasis. This is based on a practical need: immediate need for reading proficiency in English for all individuals who pursue higher education in Indonesia because the majority of scientific textbooks are in English.

Most likely, the formal education, except the English Department, does not provide enough training for the students to attain a level of proficiency adequate for normal use outside the class. This is partly due to the limited time allotted for English classes. Surely, it is further aggravated by the EFL situation in Indonesia which seems rather extreme: English is so foreign that it is merely an obligatory school subject which the students study for two or three contact-hours in class. It is not surprising, accordingly, that the outcome hardly becomes the pride of all of us.

The second channel through which English is taught in Indonesia is non-formal English courses. Particularly in big cities or towns, a great number of English courses have been set up, offering various training for a variety of purposes. Most students go to these courses to get additional training for practical purposes.

There is a great diversity in English classes in terms of activities, techniques or methods being used nowadays in Indonesia. Some still use rather traditional ways of teaching, such, as using mechanical, repetitive drills, memorising sets of phrases or using excessive translation or Grammar Translation Method. Others are beginning to adopt the recent widespread use of communicative approach. The government policy is now getting towards this direction, insist-

ing on the adoption of the recent approach of teaching English at schools throughout Indonesia. Some evaluations have been undertaken such as the revision of the curriculum to allow more meaningful and communicative presentation of language forms and the administering of a number of upgrading programs, courses, seminars and workshops to help classroom teachers implement the approach.

In spite of the many newly introduced techniques of teaching English recently, many teachers are still using rather traditional, monotonous methods with limited textbooks to support. The major reasons are that they follow strictly the official syllabus, textbooks, and grammar-based exams. Some teachers still have no access to new approaches, techniques, and textbooks. Some others simply do not understand the new approaches well. Still some others simply continue whatever practice they have been doing.

It has been a long practice in the EFL teaching in Indonesia that vocabulary courses are rather neglected for various reasons. Generally, vocabulary courses are unpopular; they require greater efforts on the part of the teachers, causing a greater burden than other courses do. Another reason why vocabulary courses are given less attention is that many teachers and students do not see the immediate needs of vocabulary in actual daily activities. The non-native situation of English in Indonesia has made both teachers and students less concerned with these vocabulary teaching and learning.

In non-formal courses the use of communicative language teaching is directed towards the teaching of the spoken skill. Most of the time, if not all, is devoted to speaking rather than vocabulary teaching and learning because the primary goal is to prepare the trainees to be able to communicate in spoken English. In junior and senior high schools and university level outside the English Department, in which English is not the language of instruction, vocabulary is taught integratedly with other courses, for instance, reading. In such a situation, students are not really taught how to develop and improve their vocabulary mastery. They are not given appropriate personal experience in using the vocabulary. Vocabulary here is mostly used as an auxiliary activity to other learning. Hence, the focus is not on learning to use but rather on learning to have some amount of vocabulary.

It goes without saying that vocabulary mastery is absolutely needed by English Department students for academic as well as non-academic or practical reasons. Vocabulary is essential for them during their study. In an academic setting, they have to deal with written English, that is, doing written academic tasks in any subject, to read some textbooks, and to speak before the classes for oral presentation. All these activities are in a need of vocabulary mastery. Apart from those immediate classroom values, vocabulary mastery is significant for their future profession. A long with the increasing roles of English as an international language, the mastery of written language in addition to spoken one, is really a determinant factor. This implies that vocabulary mastery is a must because it is hard, if not impossible, to write or to speak without having and knowing a certain number of words. Vocabulary development should be given special attention, particularly, at the Departement of English Education.

According to the curriculum of the English Education Department, Faculty of Language Education and Arts, Institute of Teacher Training Mataram, vocabulary courses are given in three semesters under the name of Vocabulary One, Two and Three. It starts from the first semester up to the third with two credit hours each. In each semester it is usually given only once a week for two class hours, each lasting fifty minutes. This means that vocabulary teaching at English Education Department is scheduled for three semesters with six credit hours.

A number of studies on vocabulary teaching indicate that students' vocabulary can be developed to a certain level. It is believed that changes in the mastery of vocabulary are made possible by a number of factors. Two major factors, internal and external are crucial. Internal factor revers to those variables that stem from the students' side. One single variable indicating such a factor is motivation. Students' motivation to learn English affects their learning achievement. Students with intrinsic motivation to be part of the target culture learn better than those without such a motivation.

Sulastri (2007) investigated the impact of using songs on the increase of students' vocabulary. The study was conducted at a Junior High School with 41 subjects. Statistic analysis of the data resulted that students' vocabulary increased significantly. This was indicated by the difference in value between the t-test and the t-table. Similar studies by Manda (2006) and Hadi (2006) revealed similar phenomenon. Hadi's experimental study on English students shows that students' mastery of vocabulary could be developed using a number of ways.

The studies on vocabulary development reported above have tended to be product-oriented; they were more interested in the outcome, result or product rather than the process. Very little was known of how the measurement and experiment were carried out before they arrived at the result.

Vocabulary measurement differs from measuring language skills, speaking for instance. As linguistic unit vocabulary falls into the domain of grammatical system; In this case, it is under the study of morphology. Linguistically speaking, word can be viewed from different standpoints; one may be interested in looking at the word from category or word classes. From this perspective we traditionally recognize content words (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) and function words (preposition, conjunction, articles, etc.). A word serves different functions; in a larger construction, a word may serve the function as the subject of a sentence or predicate. Meaning, pronunciation, use and usage are other ways that are common in the process of knowing and understanding words. It is worth noticing here that the term word here is understood as vocabulary. The former is linguistic by nature, while the latter is pedagogical in characteristic.

Viewing words from linguistic perspectives is what makes the present study different from the previous studies. Word possesses a great number of linguistic features; but some characteristics that are common to words are structure, meaning, spelling, pronunciation, function, role and use. In a rather extreme term we have the so-called use and usage, form and meaning. Whatever the term is, there are two aspects in the study of word, that is, phonological and morphological aspects. It is on these two aspects that the present study was dealing with. To say that students' vocabulary develops should mean that they have an adequate knowledge of word/vocabulary and the ability to use such knowledge for practical purposes. They should know and understand the system of grammar and the system of sound of the word. It is not enough to know only how a word is structured; it should include the ability to use it in an appropriate linguistic context of situation.

Previous studies on the same topic had been carried out but with different objectives and subjects. They identified factors that might affect successful vocabulary learning. However, the studies reported above were only pseudo-experimental. The present study with a quasi experimental design is an attempt to provide answers to the following main research question: To what extent linguistic approach is effective to develop students' vocabulary?

METHOD

This quasi experimental study was conducted in a classroom. It was research into teaching. Two variables, teaching technique and students' achievement in vocabulary, were considered. The study evaluated the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. More precisely, it was to investigate the effectiveness of linguistic approach to vocabulary development.

There were 200 Indonesian students of EFL learners in the academic year 2005/2006 constituting the population in this study. These 200 students comprised five classes taking the vocabulary course. They were first year students who had the same learning experience; they were of similar age and equal in terms of social and economic background. The total 200 subjects were too big for an experimental design. It was, therefore, decided to take 50 students as subjects of the study. These 50 participants were grouped into experimental and controlled groups consisting of 25 students each.

This study used a play written by Via (1985) as material of the research. The choice of "*Never on Wednesday*" was based on the principles of materials selection. There were a number of ways that we could use to select any teaching material, but the principles that follow are most common and preferable in preparing teaching material.

In the first place, the author, Via, was professional in his field. His reputation was internationally known. Secondly, the text and dialogues in the script were short. This is not to say that much longer work of literature such as novel which did not meet this criteria should be rejected, but shorter text with shorter dialogues were more manageable. Thirdly, the setting (at a family house) was one that many students would be familiar with, and it dealt with a common human situation, the conflict of values between the young and the old, sons and parents. Fourth, the language used in the play was not remote; it represented contemporary language, language of the present.

It was stated earlier that this study was characterized as quasi experimental. As a quasi experimental study it followed a cause-and-effect model in which the main purpose was to discover the way in which two variables, dependent and independent, were functionally related to one another. To reach this purpose some controlled manipulations were introduced into the event being studied. An experiment was set up and an event were manipulated in such a way to prevent the data from being biased or distorted.

Prior to the study, a pilot study was conducted to try out the experimental test and the selection of the definite items and the discussion of the results. It was intended to try out the preliminary tests of vocabulary. Students' mastery of vocabulary was assessed on the basis of four aspects: 1) pronunciation, 2) usage/grammar, 3) use and 4) comprehen-

sion. Each aspect of these judgements had its characteristics and rating scale as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Rating Rubric Used in the Test

Aspects of judgement	Rating scale	Qualities to be rated
Pronunciation	5	Has few traces of foreign accent
	4	Always intelligible, though one is conscious of a definite accent
	3	Pronunciation problems necessitate concentrated listening and occasionally lead to misunderstanding
	2	Very hard to understand because of pronunciation problems; must frequently be asked to repeat.
	1	Pronunciation problems so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.
Usage	5	Makes few, if any, noticeable errors of grammar
	4	Occasionally makes grammatical errors which do not, however, obscure meaning
	3	Makes frequent errors of grammar which occasionally obscure meaning
	2	Grammar errors make comprehension difficult; must often rephrase sentences and/or restrict himself to basic patterns
	1	Errors in grammar so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible
Use	5	Use of vocabulary and idioms similar to that of a native speaker
	4	Sometimes uses inappropriate terms and/or must rephrase ideas because of lexical inadequacies
	3	Frequently uses wrong words; conversation somewhat limited because of inadequate vocabulary
	2	Misuse of words and very limited vocabulary make comprehension quite difficult
	1	Vocabulary limitations so extreme as to make conversation virtually impossible
Comprehension	5	Appears to understand everything without difficulty
	4	Understands nearly everything at normal speed, although occasional repetition may be necessary
	3	Understands most of what is said at slower-than-normal speed with repetitions
	2	Has great difficulty following what is said; can understand only social conversation spoken slowly with frequent repetitions
	1	can not be said to understand even simple conversational English

A total of 22 students from different field of studies participated in this pilot study; analysis of the data resulted that the t-value was bigger than the t-table. The t-value was 2.818 and the t-table was 2.086. This means that linguistic approach was an effective method of teaching; it helped to develop students' vocabulary mastery.

RESULTS

To measure the effectiveness of the linguistic approach, I interviewed students, teachers and faculty staff asking their viewS. Questions such as, how did the students view the method? What did they think it accomplished? Would they like to have the method continued? These were all questions posed to them.

The students tended to appriciate the effort of the teacher to teach them communicative skills. Convinced that their activities were valuable, they were willing to support the project, saying that the activities should go on. With sincerest emotions they confessed that the project or experiment made them better learners. They discovered a new value in learning lexical item. Similarly, interviews with the teaching staff revealed that they were of the same perception as that of the students. Linguistic approach, they believed, was very effective for adult learners. Had they been better prepared with such an approach, the students would have learned so much more about vocabulary. With this method of teaching, students were rated better than the average students taught with conventional method. They believed that the linguistic method had a favourable impact on the students' vocabulary mastery. Students not only learned to be good language users, but also became skilled and competent with the language system. All teachers agreed that linguistic approach had positive influences on students' ability to function in the target language.

The result of the interviews held with the faculty, head of the faculty and his staff revealed similar opinions. They observed that the method had been very interesting and had a favourable influence on students' vocabulary learning achievement. Not only did most students show great interest in the learning process, but also became skillful in performing language act. Table 5 shows students', teachers' and faculty members views on the effectiveness of linguistic method (LM) of teaching vocabulary.

Table 2. Percentage of Students', Teachers' and Faculty's Perception on Effective Vocabulary Teaching

Items	Students (N=48)	Teachers (N=10)	Faculty (N=6)
Knowledge of LM			
Yes	45 (93.8%)	9 (90%)	5 (83.3%)
No	3 (6.3%)	1 (10%)	1(16.7%)
Value to students			
Yes	46 (95.8%)	10 (100%)	6 (100%)
No	2 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Value to Faculty			
Yes	25 (52.1%)	6 (60%)	5 (83.3%)
No	23 (47.9%)	4 (40%)	1 (16.7%)
Continuation of LM			
Yes	47 (97.9%)	10 (100%)	6 (100%)
No	1(2.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Curriculum			
Like LM	40 (83.3%)	5 (50%)	3 (50%)
Tourism	6 (12.5%)	5 (50%)	2 (33.3%)
Others	2 4.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (16.7%)
Effect of LM			
Profit to Faculty	1 (2.1%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)
Trained students	38 79.2%)	4 (40%)	1 (16.7%)
Reduced absentees	3 (6.3%)	3 (30%)	1 (16.7%)
Brought in cooperation	6 (12.5%)	1 (10%)	1(16.7%)
Too early to judge	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	3 (50%)
Solution to students' problem			
Retain in school	7 (14.59%)	2 (20.00%)	1 (16.67%)
Sent to join the class	38 (79.17%)	7 (70.00%)	5 (83.33%)
Don't know	3 (6.25%)	1 (10.00%)	0 (0%)

The subjects, 48 students, 2 out of 50 were absent, were put into two different groups, experimental and control. Teaching and learning activities were conducted in the classroom for both groups with the same material, time and criteria of evaluation, except for the teaching method. The former was taught using linguistic method while the latter was instructed with conventional method. The process was going on for one semester.

The assessment was carried out twice, before and after the treatment. The data in terms of scores from the two groups were compared to see if there are some differences in learning achievement between the experimental and the control group. To see the significance of the differences a t-test was applied.

The t-test analysis shows that the t value (2.781) is bigger than the value of the t-table (2.064).

Students were provided with drama script and each of them play the role. Through dialogues the students practice the so-called language use. Use, from linguistic point of view, is the system of sounds. In the sound system of language students practice their pronunciation that is one aspect of word that

students should learn. Pronunciation practice, contextual use of word and usage provide students with learning experience. Experience from empirical theory of leaning is basic because we learn to use the word by using it. Similarly, we learn to pronounce the word by pronunciation practice. Analysis of the empirical data on 5 students from experimental group shows significant change of students' performance in terms of vocabulary mastery.

DISCUSSION

This study is an attempt to see how effective the linguistic approach is in developing students' vocabulary mastery. The results of the study are discussed in comparison with the previous studies and with related learning theory. Firstly, The findings indicate that students' interest and motivation increase. This implies that the implementation of linguistic approach during the teaching process attract the students' attention.

There is a belief that interest and motivation have a basis of some kind, that is knowledge. One

is interested when she/he knows something, and wants to know more. But it is necessary to note that interest, however, is not a form of knowledge, though knowledge may be interesting; neither is it a kind of action, though action too may be interesting.

Some authors contend that students' mastery of English can be made better; their vocabulary can be developed and the development follows regular steps. This finding is clearly in contrast with the previous findings where students' vocabulary development does not follow regular steps, from basic level to advanced, for instance. However, we are of the same opinion that students' mastery of English can be made better and this can be done through doing.

Wittgenstein (1953) proposed a theory that *language is use.* Communication, he said, involves language, and language is an instrument by which we communicate ideas The effectiveness of a tool depends on how we use it and for what purpose it is used (Iso & Aizawa, 2007).

In this study, we also observed that there is a change in students' performance. By performance we mean here the ability of the students to function both in oral and written English. As it is indicated earlier that use and usage are two aspects of a linguistic unit focal in this study. Word has its system of sound and system of grammar. Oral is speech and speech is sound and to produce the sound one should have such knowledge of the sound system. The same is true to usage.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The results of data analysis indicate that students from the experimental group perform better; their performance, motivation and interest increase significantl and their vocabulary develops from basic into intermediate level. This means that linguistic approach is effective and its effectiveness is verified by students' learning achievement. Unlike laboratory experiment, this experiment is a classroom research. Hence it suffers from two things. Firstly, the setting (the classroom) and the subjects under study (the students) are very hard, if not impossible, to control in the real sense of the words. Since man is the measure of all things, of things as they are, and of things that are not as they are, bias therefore, is unavoidable. Secondly, intervening variables such as interest and motivation, since they are innate to the subjects, contribute in some ways to the research findings. Similar study focusing on the impact of interest and motivation on vocabulary development is, therefore, imperative for future experiment.

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